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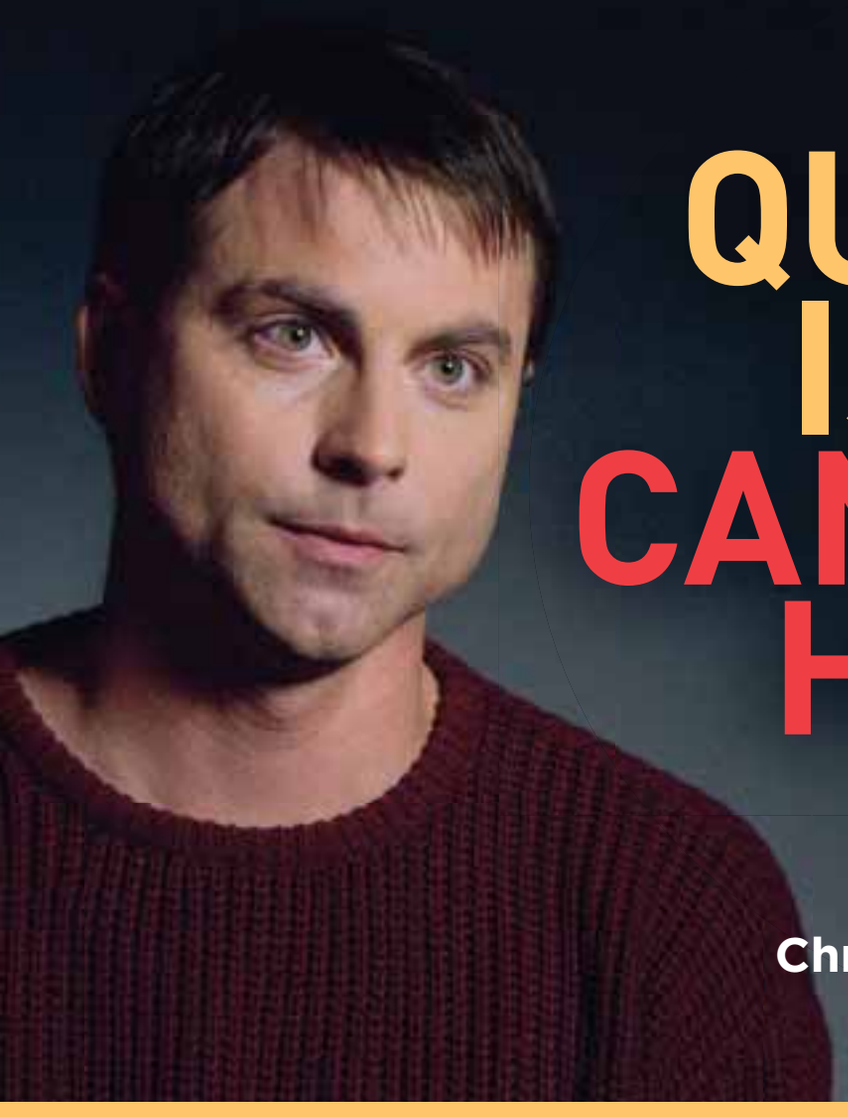

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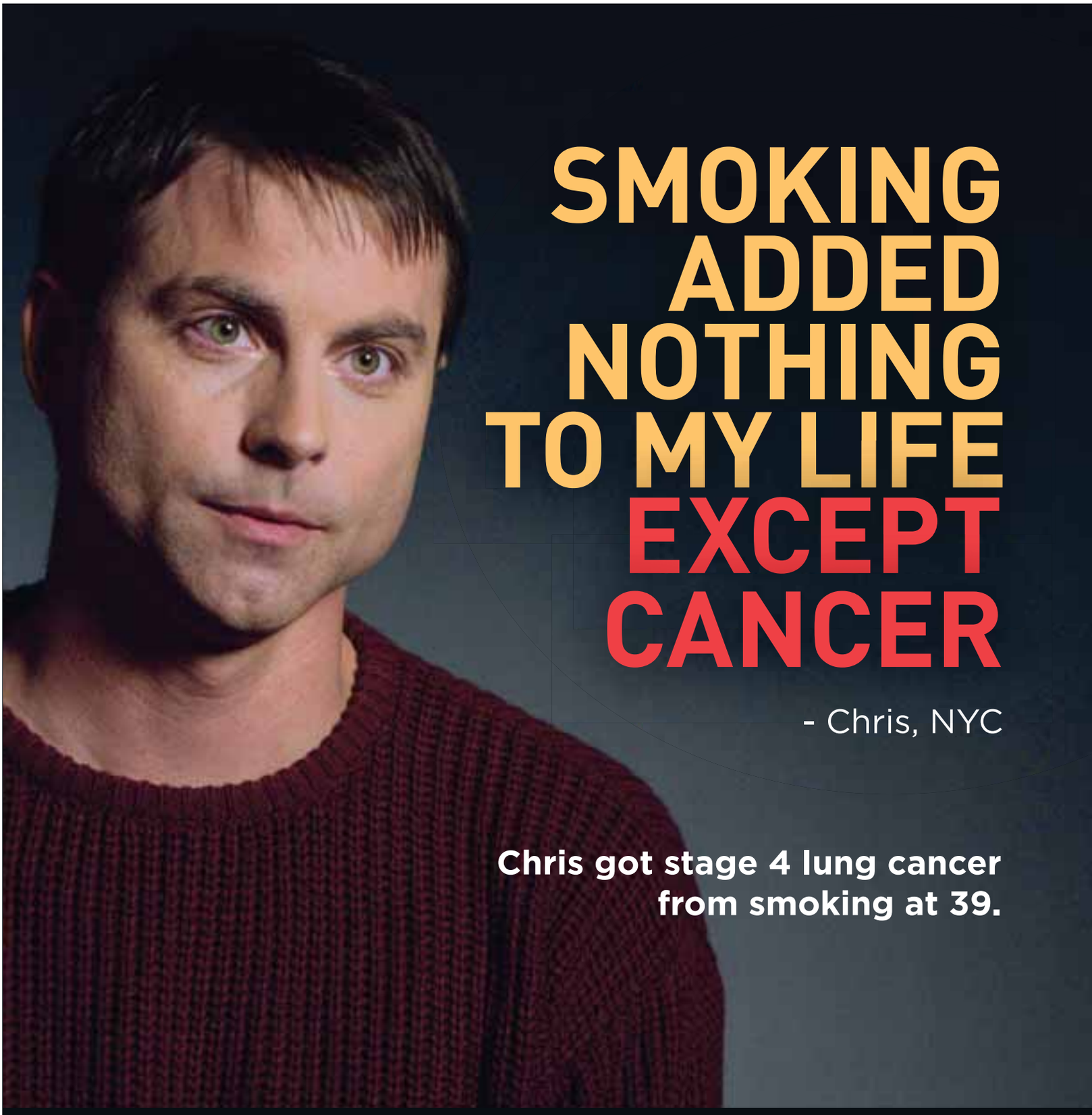

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TIMES SQUARE: QUIRKY AND SAFE?

New rules would rein in costumed characters. 2

3 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

PAKISTAN HUNTS MILITANTS BEHIND BLAST THAT KILLED 70

Pakistan has decided to launch a paramilitary crackdown on Islamist militants in Punjab, the country's richest and most populous province, after an Easter Day bombing killed 70 people in the provincial capital Lahore, officials said on Monday. Sunday's suicide bombing at a public park was claimed by the Pakistani Taliban's Jamaat-ur-Ahrar faction, which once declared loyalty to Islamic State. The group said it was targeting Christians. The brutality of the attack, Jamaat-ur-Ahrar's fifth bombing since December, reflects the movement's attempts to raise its profile among Pakistan's increasingly fractured Islamist militants. At least 29 children enjoying an Easter weekend outing were among those killed when the suicide bomber struck. REUTERS

LAWMAKERS, UNIONS REACH $15 MINIMUM WAGE DEAL IN CALIF.

2 California lawmakers and union leaders have reached a tentative deal to raise the state's minimum wage to $15 over six years that could avert a campaign to bring the issue to voters, two California newspapers reported, citing unnamed sources. The deal, if passed in the state Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown, would add to a wave of minimum wage increases at the state level in the United States, where the federal minimum wage has remained at $7.25 an hour for more than six years. The agreement, as reported by the Los Angeles Times and the Sacramento Bee, would gradually raise the minimum wage in the most populous U.S. state from the current $10 to $15 in 2022. REUTERS

IRAN VOWS TO PURSUE MISSILE PROGRAM DESPITE NEW SANCTIONS

3 Iran will pursue its development of ballistic missiles despite the U.S. blacklisting of more Iranian companies linked to the program, a senior Revolutionary Guards commander said Monday. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) test-fired several ballistic missiles this month, drawing condemnation from Western leaders who believe the tests violate a United Nations resolution. The U.S. Treasury Department blacklisted on Thursday two Iranian companies, cutting them off from international finance over their connection to the missile program. Washington had imposed similar sanctions on 11 businesses and individuals in January over a missile test carried out by the IRGC in October 2015. REUTERS

The Times Square Alliance, along with elected officials, held a press conference to detail the need for the city to regulate pedestrian plazas and to recount negative experiences with hawkers and hustlers in Times Square. Councilman Dan Garodnick spoke. BESS ADLER

Officials: New rules would keep Times Square 'quirky' but safe

ANGY ALTAMIRANO
@MetroNewYork
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With the summer just months away, local officials are calling for new rules for pedestrian plazas citywide that would let areas like Times Square keep what makes them unique — but allow people to feel comfortable and safe.

The Times Square Alliance gathered with elected officials and local employees Monday morning to emphasize the need to regulate pedestrian plazas. Times Square has recently seen a flood of costumed characters and painted naked women, known as the desnudas, soliciting for money.

The city council recently introduced legislation that would give the city's Department of Transportation the ability to set rules for pedestrian plazas throughout the city. The bill will be discussed during a public hearing on Wednesday.

During Monday's rally, officials pointed at recent incidents that have occurred in Times Square in which New Yorkers, tourists and employees have faced negative experiences with those soliciting for money.

Over the weekend, a Times Square Spider-Man — later identified as Abdelamine El-Khezzan — was arrested on assault charges after allegedly kicking a Virginia woman who wouldn't tip him after he posed with her children for a picture, according to the New York Post. He was released and due back in court on April 6.

"This is a real issue," said Tim Tompkins, president of the Times Square Alliance. "We're not saying that all the people who are dressed in costume behave this way, but there is a consistent and ongoing issue that needs to be dealt with."

The Times Square Alliance also released tweets from people detailing incidents of verbal abuse and inappropriate touching.

"Times Square is only a fun experience if you enjoy being groped by grown men in knockoff Disney character costumes," wrote one Twitter user.

The Alliance added that in a recent survey, 61 percent of Times Square employees reported experiencing a negative encounter with a costumed character or other commercial solicitor. Out of those employees, 51 percent said they felt unsafe.

"I just want to feel safe and feel like you can have a swift commute to work and at the same time continue to have the entertainment and excitement [here]," said Ali Hoyt, who has worked in Times Square for two years.

Councilman Dan Garodnick, who is co-sponsoring the bill, said that the regulations would create zones where commercial activities and solicitations could and could not take place.

"We need to crack down on the bad actors out here. We need rules that make sense," Garodnick said. "A simple framework that lets everyone enjoy the benefits of the plazas, with the freedom to find the characters if they want to and to avoid them if they don't."

One of Times Square's best-known celebrities, The Naked Cowboy, also voiced — and sang — his support for the regulations and added that he sees it as a way to create a better environment for all.

"Times Square is the No. 1 tourist destination in the world, and I think with everyone's participation, it'll be even better this year," he said. "If I have to lose some of my own little freedom to run around, so be it. I think it will increase the quality of the performers."

However, during Monday's press conference, members of the Transport Workers Union Local 225 were concerned that the legislation would allow the DOT to limit ticket sales and in the end take away jobs from those selling tickets for sightseeing tours.

James Muessig, a TWU Local 225 representative, added that the regulations would also limit where the ticket sellers could be and ultimately decrease ticket sales.

"I understand they're having problems with Spider-Man, but why craft legislation to take care of the Spider-Man problem that puts these men out of business," Muessig said. "They counted on this income."

Tompkins reassured critics the legislation was not looking to take away any jobs but instead just control what happens around the plazas.

"Times Square should be unusual. We say quirky is fine but creepy is not," Tompkins said. "No category of activity would be banned. … It's simply allowing that this commercial activity be regulated."

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SWAROVSKI

Three separate surveillance images of the suspected serial robber. NYPD

Man targeting elderly women in violent robbery spree: NYPD

The suspect has been robbing elderly women in Brooklyn and Queens since January.

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A serial robber has been targeting elderly women across two boroughs — following most of his victims to their homes in broad daylight before threatening them with violence, police said.

The first robbery was reported Jan. 20 at about 5 p.m. near Myrtle Avenue and Weirfield Street in Queens. According to authorities, the suspect, followed a 76-year-old woman to her home, and as she reached the door, the man put his hands over her mouth and pushed her inside. He then demanded money at knifepoint and pointed a firearm at a 87-year-old man, demanding more money. The suspect fled with about $800.

On Feb. 11, at about 2:30 p.m., around Prospect Place and 6th Avenue in Brooklyn, the same man is suspected of following a 71-year-old woman into her residence, where he attempted to tie her up. He also had a gun, and struck her on the left side of the lip, causing a laceration. The suspect then took about $375 and fled on foot east on Prospect Place.

The same alleged robber then targeted a 91-year-old victim as she entered a location on 9th Street near Prospect Park West, also in Brooklyn. He approached her from behind, placed her in chokehold and displayed a gun, police said. After he pushed her inside the location's vestibule, he demanded her money. As the suspect took the victim's money, a 50-year-old man came across them, and the suspect then pointed his gun at the man and took his money, police said. The suspect then got away with about $370.

On March 19, at about 5:15 p.m., near Prospect Place and Carlton Avenue, in Brooklyn, the suspect followed a 43-year-old man into his residence and demanded money, according to authorities. The suspect then saw an 81-year-old woman and approached her at gunpoint and, with a boxcutter in his other hand, demanded money. The suspect fled on foot with about $330.

The same suspect is believed to have robbed an 83-year-old woman Saturday near Ocean Parkway and Beverly Road in Brooklyn at about 4:40 p.m. He allegedly followed the victim into her building, and once she was inside of her apartment the suspect knocked on her door. After she opened the door, the suspect hit her in the face with a hard object, but did not remove any items from her home. He then fled the building in an unknown direction.

Police have released several photos from the incidents and describe the suspect as a black man, 40 to 60 years old, 5 feet 10 inches to 6 feet tall and about 250 pounds.

Anyone with information in regard to these robberies is asked to call the NYPD's Crime Stoppers hot line at 1-800-577-TIPS (8477) or for Spanish, 1-888-57-PISTA (74782). The public can also submit their tips by logging onto the Crime stoppers website at or by texting their tips to 274637 (CRIMES) then enter TIP577. All calls are strictly confidential.

Queens man arrested after stealing rental car from LaGuardia Airport

A Queens man was arrested Easter Sunday after getting away with a rental car from LaGuardia Airport — after initially arriving in another stolen vehicle, according to authorities.

On March 27 at about 5 a.m. the suspect, identified as 36-year-old Jose Cabreja, drove a blue Mini Cooper convertible — which authorities later determined was stolen — into the Hertz Rental Car parking lot inside LaGuardia Airport, the Port Authority Police Department said.

He then walked into the rental office and asked to rent a car, according to police, but also told the staff that he had just been released from Rikers.

The staff refused to give Cabreja a vehicle, so the 36-year-old walked out and proceeded to steal a Infiniti QX80 that had just been returned by another customer and still had the keys in it, authorities said.

Cabreja then left the parking lot in the car, driving over spikes that caused all four tires to deflate, according to police. However, Cabreja kept driving and left the area heading westbound toward the airport exit.

PAPD officers searched for Cabreja using the stolen vehicle's GPS device, authorities said. At about 10:30 a.m. the Infiniti QX80 was found at the corner of 83rd Street and Astoria Boulevard.

Port Authority Police Lt. Dan Rhein identified Cabreja using a photo taken at the Hertz Rental Car office. Cabreja was taken into custody after a short foot pursuit, police said. He is now facing charges of grand larceny, burglary and criminal trespass.

ANGY ALTAMIRANO

Jose Cabreja. PORT AUTHORITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

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NYC to receive $750K from private sector to help battle veteran homelessness

Last year, the city placed over 1,000 veterans in permanent housing across the five boroughs.

ANGY ALTAMIRANO
@MetroNewYork
letters@metro.us

GETTY IMAGES

New York City just got an extra helping hand to support those who fought to protect this country — and currently find themselves without a place to call home.

The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City and the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA) announced Monday two partnerships with the private sector that will bring the city $750,000 to help end homelessness among veterans throughout the five boroughs.

The companies involved in the partnerships include the Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation and the Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY) and its members.

"Every veteran should receive proper housing and the services they need to help them cope with their experiences in war," Mayor Bill de Blasio said.

The Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation donated $250,000 to MOVA, the Mayor's Fund and Enterprise Community Partners to support efforts to meet and maintain Functional Zero — the national standard for ending veteran homelessness and quickly relocating all new veterans that enter the shelter system.

Through the funding, the city will be able to implement a new program that aims to develop and staff the aftercare Veterans' Transition Assistance Program; engage in strategic planning to meet and maintain Functional Zero; and restructure the process of placing homeless people and their families in permanent housing.

The Mayor's Fund also launched the Veterans Housing Initiative, a public-private partnership to provide financial aid to veterans who have successfully transitioned from the shelter system to permanent housing in order to encourage them to begin their new lives.

"Through philanthropic initiatives, Deutsche Bank is committed to addressing homelessness across New York City's most at-risk populations — domestic violence survivors, LGBTQ youth, formerly incarcerated individuals and their families, as well as veterans," said Gary Hattem, president of the Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation.

A total of $500,000 has also been raised from private partners — $450,000 from REBNY and its members — for the Veterans Housing Initiative.

Through the initiative, the Mayor's Fund will distribute Target gift cards valued up to $1,000 for eligible veterans who were placed in permanent housing at the end of 2015.

According to data from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, the number of veterans staying in shelters or on the streets has decreased by 90 percent since 2011. The daily number of homeless veterans in New York City is currently 477, which is down from 4,677 five years ago.

Last year, according to officials, the city placed over 1,000 veterans in permanent housing across the city and so far 437 veterans have been placed in permanent housing in 2016.

"We have effectively ended chronic veteran homelessness in the city, but we recognize that there is still much to be accomplished to assist New Yorkers who have put their lives at risk to protect our nation," said Human Resources Administration Commissioner Steven Banks. "These partnerships between the private and public sectors will help advance our commitment to helping New York City veterans obtain permanent housing and the additional supportive services they so desperately need and deserve."

Man arrested for attempted rape at Manhattan hotel after returning to get cellphone

A forgotten phone landed a man in handcuffs after he allegedly tried to rape a woman at a Battery Park hotel.

Kareem Walker, 31, of Queens, was at the upscale Conrad New York Hotel on North End Avenue with two women whom he had been at a club with this weekend, the New York Post reported.

About 6:30 a.m. Sunday, Walker allegedly tried to rape one of the women, but the 20-year-old victim's friend stopped him and the two struggled. According to the Post, the women called hotel security who saw Walker "allegedly hoisting a bottle of Moet champagne above his head as if he was about to smash it down on the women."

He then reportedly fled, leaving his phone.

The hotel called police, and when Walker came back later that morning he was arrested and charged with attempted rape, attempted grand larceny (for trying to take one of the women's phones, according to the New York Daily News), unlawful imprisonment, assault and criminal mischief. CRISTABELLE TUMOLA

Conrad New York Hotel GOOGLE MAPS

BRIEFS

Creepy Trump tombstone appears in Central Park

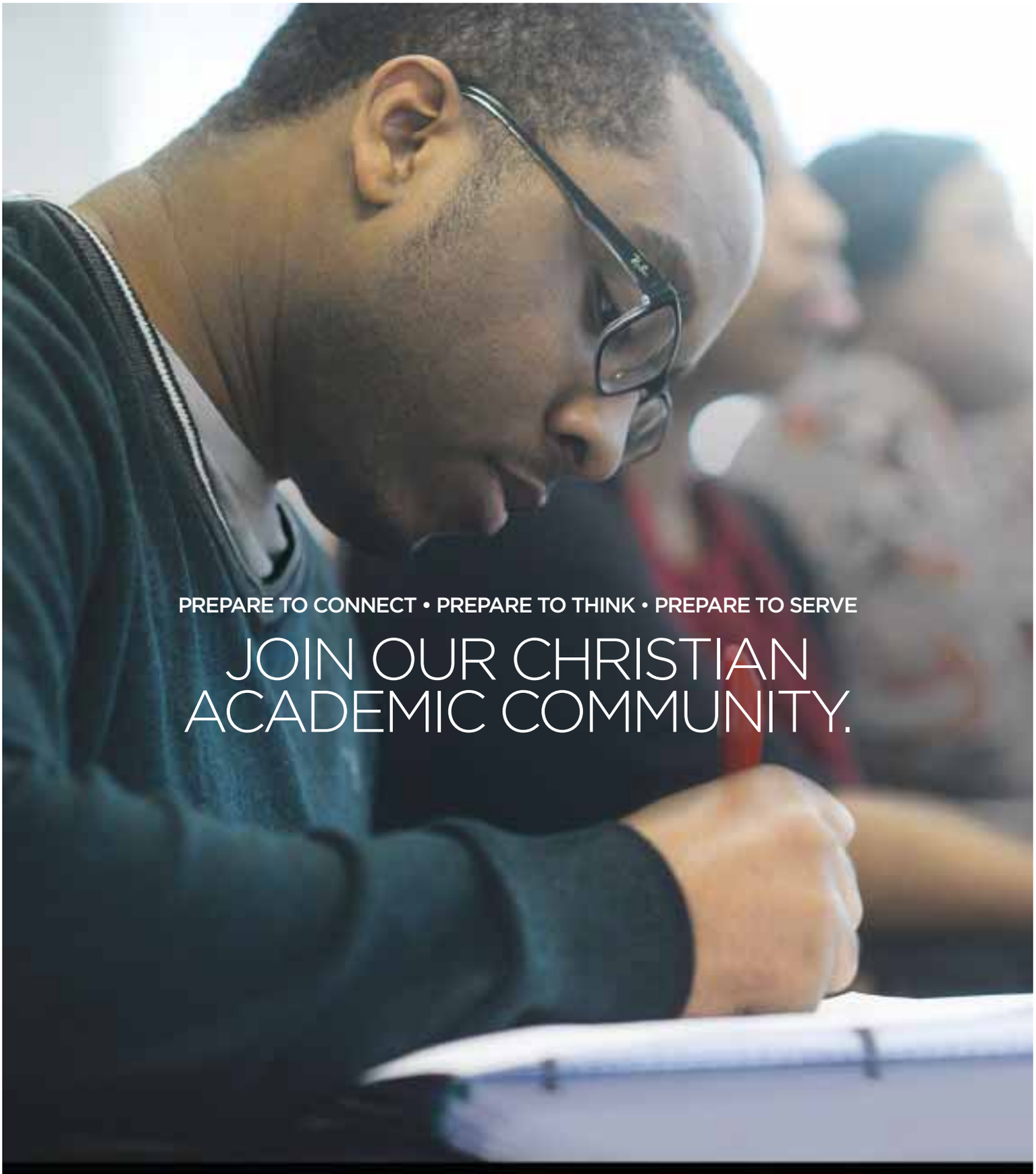
A headstone bearing the name of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has reportedly been removed from Central Park after it mysteriously appeared near the park's Sheep Meadow over the weekend.

The lone tombstone bore the epitaph, "Made America Hate Again," Time.com reported, a play on Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again."

The headstone also had the controversial candidate's birth year — 1946 — but no year of death, according to images posted on social media.

The city's Parks Department removed the object on Sunday, according to NBC4. There was no word on who placed the tombstone in the park, ABC7 reported. MORGAN ROUSSEAU

@SACHINRB/INSTAGRAM



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Kelli A. Boyer

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: BILLY BECERRA & GETTY IMAGES, INSET IMAGE: EAST COCALICO TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT

Woman skipped out on $600 cab fare from NYC to Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania woman told the driver she was getting the money, but never came out of her home.

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@MetroPhilly
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A Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, woman is facing theft charges after she took a pricey taxi ride to her Pennsylvania home and ditched the New York City cabbie before paying, police said.

Kelly A. Boyer, 44, of Denver, Pennsylvania, arrived at her Hawthorne Drive home early Sunday morning after a roughly 2½-hour drive from New York City, according to a police report.

According to the affidavit, before leaving from New York City, Boyer negotiated the fare with the cab driver for the amount of $600. Upon arrival at her residence, authorities said Boyer exited the cab, punched in her garage door access code, went into her house and then "barricaded herself" indoors.

According to the affidavit, an officer from the East Cocalico Township Police Department was dispatched to Boyer's home just before 1:15 a.m. Sunday with reports of a taxicab fare evasion.

Upon arrival at the scene, Rahman Atiqur, the cab driver, told the officer that he provided a ride to Boyer for a prenegotiated amount, picked her up in the city and dropped her off at her house. When she said she would go inside and return with the money, she never did. He said he waited 15 minutes before calling police.

Atiqur said he watched Boyer punch in the numeric door code to her garage door, go inside and then close the door behind her. Police records indicated that the Boyer home is a familiar one to the officer and that he has had "numerous contacts with [Boyer]."

Authorities said "numerous attempts were made by the responding officers to contact Boyer. The garage door was still open and the lights were on inside the house. Boyer refused to answer the door or answer the phone." But the driver was reportedly able to identify her from a photo.

A spokesman for the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission said they have 29 people in their database with Atiqur's name and have been unsuccessful at tracking him down for details.

"We were very sorry to hear about this driver's experience, but very pleased to know he reached out to the local authorities and that they are working on it," said TLC Commissioner/Chair Meera Joshi.

"Fare-jumping is every bit as much a theft as shoplifting or worse, and drivers should always reach out to the support and protection of law enforcement they deserve when they've been victimized."

A manager at Philadelphia Taxicab Service on Aramingo Avenue, who declined to be named, said that fare-jumping happens all the time in Philadelphia — a lot of times when riders are drunk.

Occasionally, and at nighttime, his drivers will have to wake riders up in the back of their cabs to get money from them. He also said it "obviously depends on how bad the situation is," whether or not police would get involved.

"A lot of things happen in this business," he said.

"For a ride like [Boyer's], most people would ask for the money in advance."

Boyer was arrested Monday morning and was being charged with theft of services.

Transgender woman raped at Stonewall Inn

Police said a transgender woman was raped inside a bathroom at The Stonewall Inn late Saturday evening.

The unidentified victim, 25, was in a unisex bathroom at the historic gay bar in Manhattan's Greenwich Village when the attacker allegedly entered the bathroom, groped and sexually assaulted her, police said. The attack allegedly happened around 11:40 p.m.

Police said the attacker fled the scene, and was described as a Hispanic male, 5-foot-10 and weighing approximately 250 pounds.

The investigation was ongoing.

The Stonewall Inn was given Historic Landmark status by New York City last year. The bar is noted as being the cradle of the modern American LGBT liberation movement. MATT LEE

The Stonewall Inn, a legendary New York City bar that was at the forefront of the gay rights movement. HANNAH MATTIX

Sean 'Diddy' Combs opens charter school in Harlem

Sean "Diddy" Combs, one of the world's most famous entrepreneurs and musicians announced on Monday that the charter school he founded will open in the Fall of 2016, the AP reported.

The Capital Preparatory Harlem Charter School, which has been in the works since 2011, will open it's doors at 1 East 104th Street this fall in a building shared with El Museo Del Barrio and next door to the Museum of the City of New York.

"Creating this school is a dream come true for me. I want to impact the lives of young people in my community and build future leaders. The first step is offering access to a quality education," Combs wrote in a press release. "Every young person should have the tools they need to succeed. All our children should be able to pursue their dreams. That is something I can impact with this school."

The school will be accepting only sixth and seventh graders for the 2016-17 school year, but will begin accepting a new grade of students every year thereafter, Newsweek reported.

The school will be headed by Steve Perry, who founded Capital Prep Magnet School in Hartford, Connecticut, in 2005 which Capital Preparatory Harlem is based off of. The school's principal will be Florida-based educator Danita Jones, the AP reported. MATT LEE

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RACE FOR THE WHITE HOUSE

Clinton to push Donald Trump and Republicans on Supreme Court fight

Clinton will criticize Republican senators for refusing to consider President Obama's nominee, Merrick Garland, and voice concern about any nominee from Trump, her campaign said.

Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton planned to assail the prospect of a Donald Trump-appointed Supreme Court justice on Monday, her campaign said, as she seeks to regain momentum from party rival Bernie Sanders, the winner of three weekend nominating contests.

A Trump nominee to fill the position vacated with the Feb. 13 death of Justice Antonin Scalia would seek to curb Americans' rights and empower corporations, Clinton intended to say in the speech urging Republicans to do their jobs and consider Garland.

Senate Republicans, including Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley, have refused to meet with Garland, a moderate federal appeals judge. Clinton's campaign said she would urge Grassley to give Garland a hearing.

Clinton planned to speak in Wisconsin, which holds a primary nominating contest on April 5.

Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton GETTY IMAGES

Sanders' wins in Alaska, Hawaii and Washington chipped away at Clinton's overwhelming lead in the race for the 2,382 delegates needed to take the Democratic nomination at the party's Philadelphia convention in July.

Trump also plans to campaign in Wisconsin this week as he seeks to build his lead over Republican rivals, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas and Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

Trump has won 738 of the 1,237 delegates needed to take the Republican nomination at its July convention in Cleveland. Cruz has won 463, while Kasich, who has vowed to stay in the race until the convention, has won 143, The New York Times said.

In the latest sign of unpredictability in the Republican race, Trump vowed to sue at least one state over its delegate allocation ahead of the convention.

"Just to show you how unfair Republican primary politics can be, I won the State of Louisiana and get less delegates than Cruz-Lawsuit coming," Trump wrote on Twitter.

Last week, the Wall Street Journal detailed the delegate fight in the state, which gave Trump and Cruz 18 each after its March 5 contest but has 10 others up for grabs.

Trump gave no other details and his campaign spokeswoman Hope Hicks had no comment.

Cruz spokesman Ron Nehring blasted Trump in a tweet and urged him to read up on party rules.

REUTERS

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DIAL 311

Immigration agents bust 1,100 suspects in gang sweep

U.S. immigration agents have arrested more than 1,000 suspects on charges including attempted murder and witness tampering, in a nationwide operation aimed at international gangs, officials said on Monday.

The five-week operation headed by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, dubbed Project Shadowfire, targeted criminal organizations linked to drug trafficking, murder and racketeering, the agency said in a statement.

Of the 1,133 arrested, 915 were cross-border gang members and associates. Just over 1,000 were charged with criminal offenses and

A U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent GETTY IMAGES

the rest face immigration charges, it said.

A majority of those arrested had links to notorious groups such as MS-13, Sureños, Norteños, Bloods and several prison-based gangs. The operation was centered on the Los Angeles; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Atlanta; San Francisco; Houston; and El Paso, Texas, areas.

While most of those detained were Americans, 239 were nationals from Mexico, Spain, El Salvador, China, Jamaica, Guatemala, Honduras, Philippines, Belize and other countries.

The special agents seized 150 firearms, more than 40 pounds of narcotics and more than $70,000 in U.S currency.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement has staged similar operations targeting gangs since 2005. Although ICE is an immigration authority, it routinely participates in operations involving U.S. citizens and non-citizens due to its expertise on international crime groups. REUTERS

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Shots fired in US Capitol complex, gunman caught

Police and EMS personnel transport the person believed to be the gunman away from the shooting scene. GETTY IMAGES

A police officer may have been injured by shrapnel on Monday in the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center when a man fired a gun, media reports and congressional sources said.

There was confusion in early accounts about what occurred but police said a suspect was taken into custody with wounds after shots were fired.

The suspect and a female bystander, who suffered wounds, were taken to the hospital, Capitol Police Chief Matthew Verderosa said at a news conference.

Verderosa said the man was known to Capitol Police.

MSNBC reported that an officer who fired at an armed suspect may have been injured by shrapnel. Police said the suspect was taken to a hospital. Law enforcement officials identified the gunman as Larry Russell Dawson of Tennessee.

A government official told Reuters that initial reports were that a suspect walked into the Visitors Center, pointed a gun at one of the police officers on duty and a shootout erupted.

The official said no evidence had materialized of a connection to terrorism.

Secret Service agents walk outside of the White House while the grounds were briefly locked down. GETTY IMAGES

Separately, CNN reported that a person tried to gain entry into the White House but was caught.

Congress is in recess, with few lawmakers in Washington, but the shooting happened just a few hours after a drill for an active shooter took place at the Capitol, creating further confusion.

The Secret Service temporarily cleared tourists from an area surrounding the White House after the incident, but activities quickly went back to normal. Capitol Hill was placed in lockdown immediately after the shooting but was later lifted. REUTERS

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As SAT was hit by security breaches, College Board went ahead with tests

A student pauses while taking a sample SAT test during his prep class. GETTY IMAGES

Internal documents show that the college entrance exam has been compromised in Asia far more often than acknowledged. And the newly redesigned SAT retains a key vulnerability that the test-prep industry has exploited for years.

Xingyuan Ding is a sophomore at UCLA, one of America's most exclusive public universities. In applying to schools, the 20-year-old from China took the SAT college entrance exam four times.

He had an advantage on his final try: a booklet compiled by a Shanghai test-preparation school he attended.

His study aid was far more valuable than the practice questions that students in America use to prepare for the SAT, the standardized test used by thousands of U.S. colleges to help select applicants. Known in Chinese as a *jijing*, the booklet was essentially an answer key. It revealed words from the correct responses to multiple-choice questions that had appeared on past SATs — many of which would be used again on the exam Ding took.

Thanks to the booklet, Ding said he already knew the answers to about half of the critical reading section of the SAT when he took the test in Hong Kong in December 2013.

"I felt really lucky," Ding said.

His score on that section? A perfect 800, he said.

Ding's advance look at material from the test he took was no fluke. His cram school is part of a vibrant Asian industry that systematically exploits security shortcomings in the SAT. Chief among them is a vulnerability created by the owner of the exam: the routine practice of reusing material from tests that already have been given.

The College Board, the not-for-profit organization that owns the SAT, has acknowledged widespread problems with test security in Asia. Since October 2014, the New York-based organization has delayed issuing scores in Asia six times and canceled an exam sitting in two locations there — steps the College Board takes when it has evidence that test material has been exposed to the public.

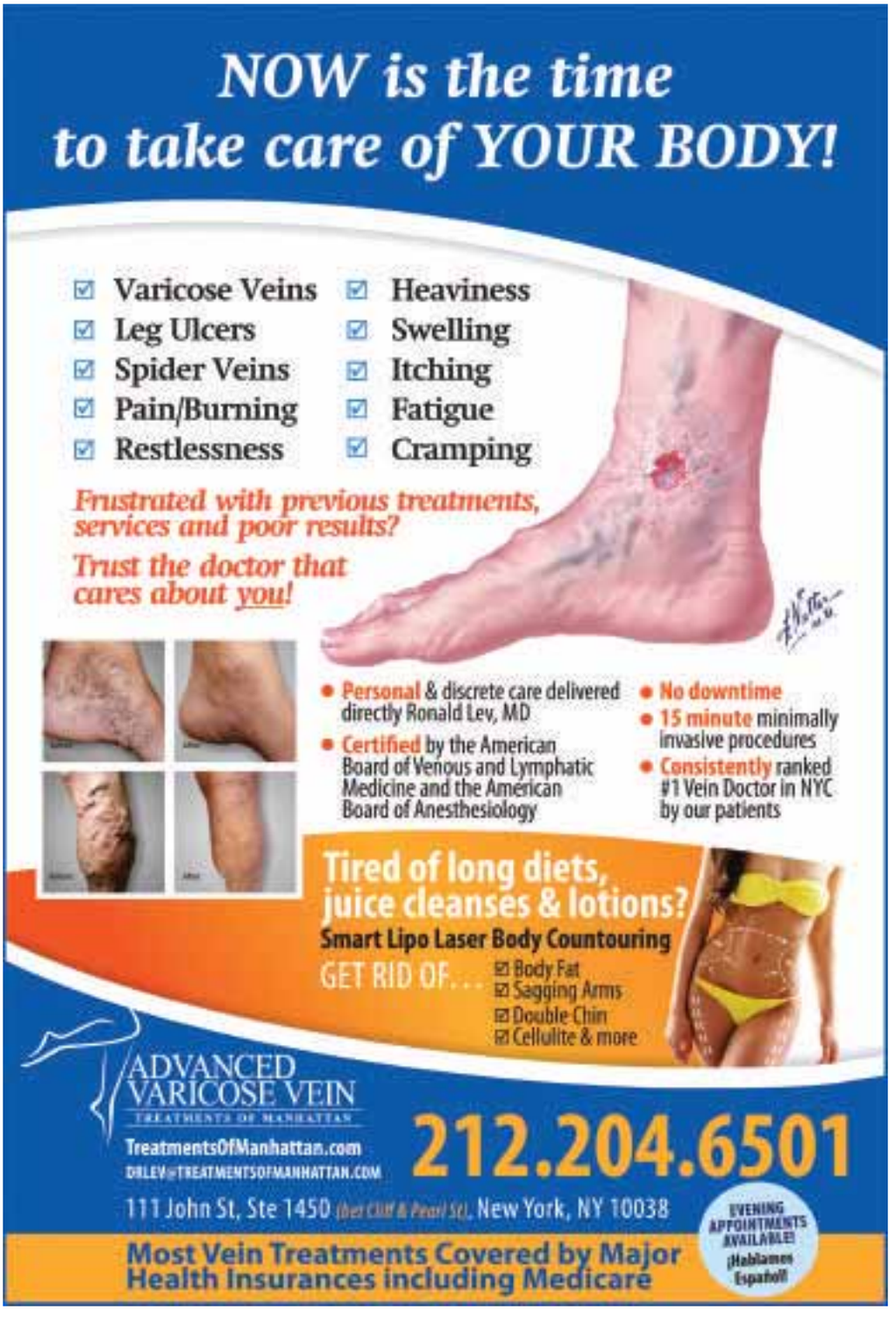
But the breakdown in security is more pervasive than the College Board has publicly disclosed. In addition to the security-related incidents the College Board has announced, the news agency identified eight occasions since late 2013 in which test material was circulating online before the SAT was administered overseas.

A confidential PowerPoint presentation reveals that College Board officials had documented widespread security problems in June 2013, shortly after canceling a sitting of the SAT in South Korea. The PowerPoint, reviewed by Reuters, shows that half of the SATs in inventory at the time had been "compromised" — the College Board's term to describe exams whose contents have leaked, in whole or in part, outside the organization. Four of the exams had been compromised by an unnamed "Chinese website."

Even so, College Board officials confirmed that some portions of those tainted tests were later administered overseas. And the College Board took no steps to restrict testing in China, the SAT's largest market by far, even as it tightened security in smaller countries where exams had leaked.

About 64,000 students took the SAT in East Asia during the 2013-14 school year, including 29,000 from China. And some 125,000 mainland Chinese undergraduates now attend U.S. universities.

REUTERS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Cuba's Fidel Castro knocks sweet-talking Obama after 'honey-coated' visit

Tourists pose for a picture next to a sign with the images of Cuban and U.S. Presidents Raul Castro and Barack Obama in Havana, Cuba. GETTY IMAGES

Retired Cuban leader Fidel Castro accused President Barack Obama of sweet-talking the Cuban people during his visit to the island last week and ignoring the accomplishments of Communist rule, in an opinion piece carried by all state-run media on Monday.

Obama's visit was aimed at consolidating a detente between the once intractable Cold War enemies and the U.S. president said in a speech to the Cuban people that it was time for both nations to put the past behind them and face the future "as friends and as neighbors and as family, together."

"One assumes that every one of us ran the risk of a heart attack listening to these words," Castro said in his column, dismissing Obama's comments as "honey-coated" and reminding Cubans of the many U.S. efforts to overthrow and weaken the Communist government.

Castro, 89, laced his opinion piece with nationalist sentiment and, bristling at Obama's offer to help Cuba, said the country was able to produce the food and material riches it needs with the efforts of its people.

"We don't need the empire to give us anything," he wrote.

Fidel Castro took power in a 1959 revolution and led the country until 2006, when he fell ill and passed power to his brother Raul Castro. He now lives in relative seclusion but is occasionally heard from in opinion pieces or seen on television and in photos meeting with visiting dignitaries.

The iconic figure's influence has waned in his retirement and the introduction of market-style reforms carried out by Raul Castro, but Fidel Castro still has a moral authority among many residents, especially older generations.

Obama did not meet with Fidel Castro during his visit, nor mention him in any of his public appearances.

REUTERS

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Facebook's Oculus starts shipping Rift virtual reality headset

A Rift VR headset GETTY IMAGES

Virtual reality company Oculus started shipping its highly awaited Rift headsets Monday, about two years after the company was acquired by social media giant Facebook.

The earliest investors in Oculus's fundraising campaign on crowdfunding website Kickstarter in 2012 started receiving their Rift headsets from Monday.

The first of the pre-orders will start shipping from midweek, Oculus said.

The company, founded in 2012, launched a campaign on Kickstarter to raise $250,000. A couple of years later, Facebook bought Oculus for about $2 billion.

Facebook Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg has said that he saw virtual reality as the next major computing platform.

This year, HTC Corp. and Sony Corp. are also set to launch their virtual reality devices as companies look to offer enhanced gaming and entertainment experiences to customers.

"The headset you can buy today is not Oculus' most ambitious vision for virtual reality — but it's a vision that Oculus has successfully delivered on," Adi Robertson of technology website the Verge said in a review Monday.

The black headgear, priced at $599, comes with a remote, an audio system, a sensor and an Xbox One wireless controller.

Oculus said there were more than 30 games available on the Oculus Store and that it would soon add feature-length movies and more content. REUTERS

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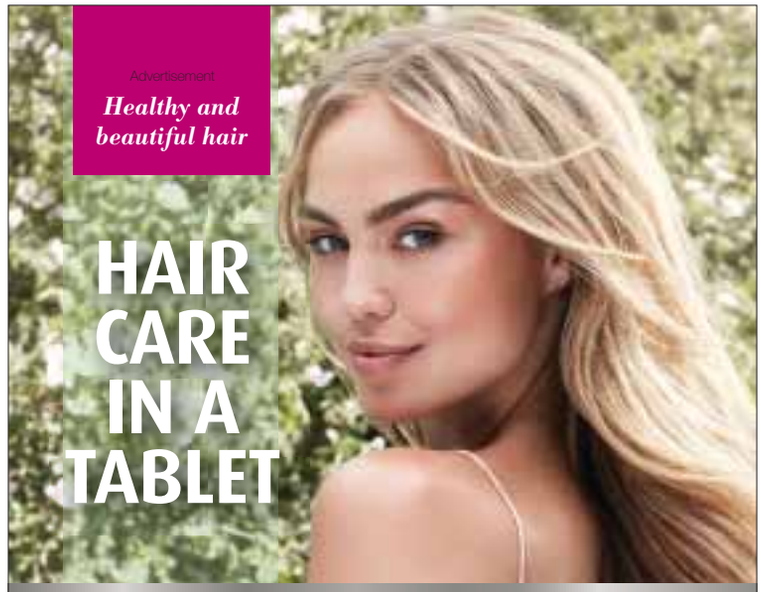

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Chris Hemsworth is like, 'See ya, Hollywood'

ALL PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

Sorry, Hollywood. You've got one less Hemsworth brother to stalk around the aisles of Whole Foods. Marvel's resident Thor, Chris Hemsworth, has packed up his brood and taken them back to Australia, where he'll be chilling when he's not in town to make the movie magic. "I love what I do as an actor, but when you are surrounded by it constantly, it becomes a bit suffocating," he tells Modern Luxury magazine, because why wouldn't he be talking to Modern Luxury magazine? "It's no longer all about me, which is quite refreshing. Once the kids arrived, I was like, 'Wow, this is what life is about.' We were living shoulder to shoulder in the suburbs and thought that's not how we want our kids to grow up," he explains of his decision to move with his wife and three children. "Moving to a kind of farm setup back here on the coast in Australia has been the best thing." That sounds sweet and all, until Hemsworth explains that when he's not working he'll just be at home, waiting "for my kids to come give me a hug and tell me they love me." Yikes. Someone's sounding a little desperate.

Kylie Jenner not a fan of Dave Chappelle's Caitlyn Jenner material

The good news? Dave Chappelle is solidly back in the stand-up world, having just wrapped up three sold-out performances at the Hollywood Palladium. The bad news? He spent about seven minutes of his final performance on a bit about Caitlyn Jenner — while Kylie Jenner was in the audience with boyfriend Tyga, according to TMZ. Sources from inside the venue say Chappelle started by reminiscing about Bruce Jenner's Olympic athlete days before recounting a run-in with Kanye West: "I said, 'Kanye, why the long face?' And Kanye replied, 'Man, you'll see,'" Chappelle said, which apparently brought the house down. Everyone — including Tyga — was laughing, while Kylie kept a straight face throughout the whole bit. Though to be fair, she's paid a lot of good money to be able to keep a straight face throughout pretty much any situation. The question I have is do you think Chappelle knew that Jenner the Younger was in the crowd before launching into the bit? I totally bet he did.

Apparently you actually can embarrass Miley Cyrus

You might think that Miley Cyrus has no shame, but you'd be wrong. The "Wrecking Ball" singer — so fond of minimal yet complicated outfits and exposed tongues — was spotted courtside at a New York Knicks game with sister Brandi and mom Tish recently, and she did not necessarily look at ease with all the Jumbotron attention she was getting once the camera-folk spotted her. Sure, she offered up a trademarked double peace sign with tongue out, but her heart clearly wasn't in it. Just to prove how mortified she was, Cyrus posted her own Instagram shot of the big screen showing her giving a much less outlandish expression, along with the caption, "Embarrassed of all embarrassed." But hey, at least she was smart enough to wear a Knicks shirt while visiting the Garden.

DAILY VIDEO

YOUTUBE

Kiefer Sutherland's "Not Enough Whiskey"

It's not uncommon for famous actors to indulge in their own rockstar fantasies by trying their hands at music careers, but I honestly didn't see this one coming. Kiefer Sutherland apparently wants to be a country singer, and he's got an album coming out to prove it. He's also got a new music video for his song "Not Enough Whiskey," and it's ... not great. This is apparently what he'd rather be doing than starring in yet another round of "24."

A Posh-less Spice Girls are ready to hit the road

Want some news that will simultaneously excite you and make you feel really, really old? The Spice Girls are reportedly set to announce a great big 20th anniversary tour, at least according to Us Weekly. "The girls have long been keen to do a major reunion tour together," a source says. Of course, when that source says "the girls," there's one Girl not on the list — yet. Apparently Victoria "Posh Spice" Beckham has been more than a little reluctant, which may be due in part to that Beckham family $770 million net worth thing, but whatever. "If she doesn't agree, they are moving ahead without her," the source says. But know at least that the fashion guru and mother of four is trying to play nice. "She won't sing or dance," another source says, but "there's a small chance she'll film something with them or make an appearance at a show here and there." How generous.

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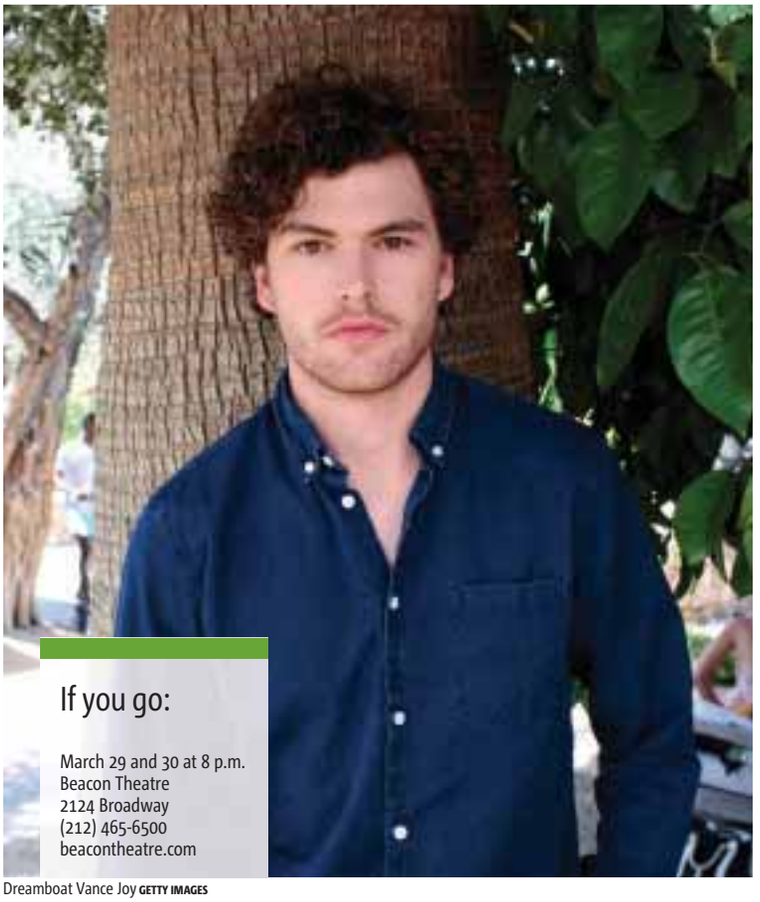

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Dreamboat Vance Joy GETTY IMAGES

Vance Joy brings 'The Fire and the Flood' to East Coast

The "Riptide" singer-songwriter took down tips from Taylor Swift's "1989" tour.

REENA KARASIN
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Aussie singer-songwriter Vance Joy is preparing to return to the East Coast this month with his "The Fire and the Flood" tour, where he will wrap up his three-and-a-half-month North America stay.

The 28-year-old spent much of last year supporting Taylor Swift's "1989" world tour after she covered his hit single "Riptide" for BBC Radio 1's Live Lounge. Joy then joined Swift for dates in North America, the U.K. and Australia, and says he's been applying what he learned from working with the "Wildest Dreams" megastar to his own stage show.

"The overall feeling she has is that she's talking directly to each person in the crowd," Joy says. "I think being able to create intimacy in a 50,000-person venue is pretty cool, so I try to make our shows intimate and try to be myself and try to be in the moment and just being real."

But Joy says that he's appreciative of the freedom of his own tour, noting that the smaller venues allow him to interact with fans, and that his team feels like family.

"I enjoyed hanging out in Canada with our support band, Reuben and the Dark," he says. "They're really lovely people — Ruben, who's the lead singer, is a really great skateboarder, and he gave me this skateboard to thank us for having him and his band on tour. That was really cool."

But Joy says being on the road is grueling and that he's "ready to disengage" once the tour wraps March 30 in New York. And he's already looking ahead to his next album.

"I'm always chipping away, writing songs, always thinking about songs," Joy says. "It's a balance between wanting time off, but I'm at that point where I'd like to put another album out."

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Jesse Eisenberg can't do a stock villain

GETTY IMAGES

The actor offers a very different Lex Luthor in "Batman v Superman."

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Jesse Eisenberg's Lex Luthor in "Batman v Superman" is likely unlike any other take on the supervillain audiences have seen before — and that's all completely intentional.

In fact, you might not have imagined hearing Superman's most notable villain described as a pacifist before, but that's just a part of the acclaimed actor's new take on things. In the latest superhero movie, Eisenberg's Luthor is now a young, peppy sociopath, prone to hammy line readings and hand-clapping.

Since comic book movies have become such a main corner of the film industry, do you think people have been taking them more seriously?

I think you have to. I think you have no choice if you're going to make one and you don't want to be completely derivative. You have to bring in somebody, for example, like they did here with ["Argo" writer] Chris Terrio, whose background is not comic books, whose background is not in genre culture, who's interested in politics, who's interested in theater.

In "Batman v Superman," Jesse Eisenberg, with Henry Cavill and Ben Affleck, plays a more keyed-up Lex Luthor than usual. WARNER BROS. PICTURES

Along those lines, how do you turn Lex Luthor into a believable, realistic, human character?

I think it would be impossible for me to play the stock villain character because I don't have any of those attributes. I'm not a severe-looking, brooding man. I am just somebody who — not intentionally, but probably — exudes an amount of emotion, irrespective of my personal intent as an actor. And so I think I instinctively make this character more of a tortured man rather than somebody who's kind of a one-note, villainous bad guy.

Mustache-twirling?

Yes, exactly. And I think if he has any kind of campiness, it comes from his own need to hide his true feelings, which are, as the movie progresses, increasingly dark.

There's a very performative aspect to him early on. He's really putting on a show.

I think he puts on a face of an affable, philanthropic businessman. My sense as a cynical, paranoid person is that most people who have a charming exterior are probably scary. I would sooner trust the shy guy than the guy who seems like he's your best friend within the first five minutes of meeting you, and that's what this character is. He immediately tries to charm people, and if it doesn't work he immediately turns on them. He's the kid who gets his toy taken away prematurely and turns petulant.

Passion project

You're also an accomplished playwright. How has it been juggling the multiple roles in the entertainment world?

If you're a movie actor, seemingly every other door is willing to open. Actors in movies wield an inordinate amount of power — actors on movies change dialogue and there's a kind of vanity aspect to it. So I feel very fortunate to have been given this kind of platform, and it certainly helps get my foot in other doors. And once I'm in those doors, I feel like I need to compete on my own terms.

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Elektra (Elodie Yung) and the Punisher (Jon Bernthal) make life difficult for Daredevil in Season 2. PATRICK HARBRON, NETFLIX

Double trouble in Hell's Kitchen

We chat with the new big bad, and a not-so-good ex, of "Daredevil."

Metro World News
letters@metro.us

The first season of "Daredevil" spent as much time developing its villain, Wilson Fisk, as its title hero. But the baddies may have taken the edge in the show's second season, which just dropped in its 13-episode entirety on Netflix. In fact, Jon Bernthal's performance as the Punisher is so good that Netflix is rumored to be giving him his own spinoff series. Bernthal, along with Elodie Yung as Elektra, joined the cast led by Charlie Cox (Matt Murdock/Daredevil) for Season 2.

Superhumans

The superhero boom is an understandable response to modern problems, says Bernthal. They are strong enough to confront the fears — from terrorism to environmental disasters — that feel too big for ordinary people. "It makes sense that we seek these stories of beings that can do something about it," he says.

Yung, on the other hand, confesses that she doesn't follow superhero projects; however, the drama and chemistry humanizes the characters, giving nonfans a way into the story. "I think that it's what makes this series successful," she says.

Unlike many other blockbuster villains, the Punisher has a personal vendetta: revenge for the murder of his family. Creating the character was a dark process. "I would have not been able to do this role if I was not a father and a husband," Bernthal says. "It's only when you love something more than yourself that you understand the notion of how you would feel if you lost that love. Preparation is both physical and emotional."

It's complicated

Matt Murdock is conflicted after becoming the vigilante Daredevil to clean up the streets of Hell's Kitchen. His relationship with Elektra is interwoven with an old complicated romance that unites them despite their differences.

"She thinks they are very similar. In many ways, they have similarities: Matt may have that darkness and she may be able to trigger it," Yung explains. "Elektra feels no guilt, kills without blinking, and you do not know whether she is being manipulative or honest. Matt has a strong moral sense and adds an emotional component."

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Reggie Watts: Don't let tech take you over

Reggie Watts plays "himself" as a musician-comic who gets involved in an ad campaign for a new Google Glass-y piece of tech (but better) in "Creative Control," now on VOD. MAGNOLIA PICTURES

The comic, musician and "Late Late Show" band leader gets deep for the indie "Creative Control."

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In the new indie "Creative Control," Reggie Watts plays a version of himself: a musician and comic, one considered cool enough to co-create and star in a hot new ad campaign. You know him from his free-form solo stage shows (such as 2010's "Why S— So Crazy?"), co-starring on the "Comedy Bang! Bang!" TV show and his current stint: leading the house band on "The Late Late Show with James Corden." But there's always a serious side to Watts' goofiness. "Creative Control" goes full dark, depicting a near-future where characters (like the one played by Benjamin Dickinson, also the director and co-writer) use a new and improved version of Google Glasses for nefarious purposes.

"Creative Control" seems to really speak to some of your own interests. Your use of tech, for instance, isn't just being a slave to it. You've found creative ways to use gadgets.

Technology is a tool. Technology is there to serve humans. When technology becomes smarter and more social, we don't notice the weird shift, and we end up working for our technology, responding to every alert technology gives us. I'm not a big fan of that. That's not why I like technology. I like technology because when it's designed well, it appeals on an aesthetic level and a creative level, instead of creating frustration and disappointment and addiction. I'm always going to be addicted to technology insofar as I love design and I love what technology can do. But that's the limit of my addiction.

The glasses here are a lot like Google Glasses, only they actually work well.

They don't look like a piece of crap on your face with a camera that's intimidating to people. Now it's just a pair of glasses. They're integrated stylistically into everyday usage. That's exciting to see the design of that, the form factor, and it's beautiful. But projecting how that will affect us on a societal level, that's hard to say. It's really a tool, so it depends on how people use it. You're either going to use it in a creative way that's transparent, where everyone knows what you're doing — or you're going to use it in a nefarious way, like sampling people when they're not looking or doing gross things, like the characters in this movie.

Late night

You've often talked about not caring what audiences think and just doing what you do. How have you adjusted to the "Late Late Show"? That's perhaps an even bigger audience than you've ever had.

I haven't really noticed too much of a change, really, actually. Of all the late night talk shows, at least on the networks, we're the most underdog-ish. That's kind of cool. I like that feeling of being the "Bad News Bears" of late night.

The characters in this movie definitely use it in nefarious ways, but it's important to note that this could be used for good. Do you always feel partially optimistic about new tech?

Any time I receive or read about or invest in a piece of technology, I want to interact with it, to see if it's good. Was the vision realized? Do they know what they have and what it can do? I like figuring out things they didn't plan on it doing.

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Rachel Zoe falls asleep to episodes of 'Friends'

"I've seen every episode about 600 times."

RACHEL RACZKA
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Rachel Zoe incorporated washable looks into her fall collection. PROVIDED

Superstar stylist Rachel Zoe became synonymous with Hollywood's social "it" girl set before there was Instagram, but today, Zoe has her hands in even more parts of the industry. Having just celebrated her apparel line's first pop-up in Los Angeles and a well-touted fall 2016 ready-to-wear collection at New York Fashion Week, Zoe brings her expertise to the rest of us through a new partnership with Downy. She calls us from Los Angeles to talk about her balancing act, who she's loving on the red carpet these days and how she keeps her own wardrobe looking oh-so-fresh.

How did you get involved with Downy to create washable looks for the fall collection?
It came out of my genuine interest about fabric care as a designer and a stylist. You can never really have enough knowledge about how to take care of your clothes. As a designer, you have to take it into consideration for the customer and their wanting to wash things at home and not running to the dry cleaner. It's such a gift and luxury for women on the go, which at this point, everyone is.

Any stylist tricks for saving pieces that have gone wrong?
Always read the label — it's there for a reason. I think people think a lot of things are washable, but they're not, or it ends up being issues with the dryer that damages it.

Having been part of the early days of reality TV, do you ever indulge in watching it yourself?
I do not, but I don't have a lot of time. I do love "The Voice," but I don't think you can really call that "reality." I really just watch reruns of "Friends" at 11 p.m. because I fall asleep.

Do you have a favorite character?
I love them all so much. I've seen every episode about 600 times.

Any red carpet newcomers you're loving?
I loved Rooney Mara. She's not brand-new but I always love what she's wearing. And I saw Maddie Hasson on the ["I Saw the Light"] red carpet and she's really amazing. Not only is she beautiful, but I loved what she was wearing. She had a great, great Rodarte the other day.

Michael Chernow ('08 grad), founder of The Meatball Shop and Seamore's in NYC

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Augusten Burroughs on love and sobriety

The "Lust & Wonder" author tells us it was never his intention to paint a pretty picture.

REENA KARASIN
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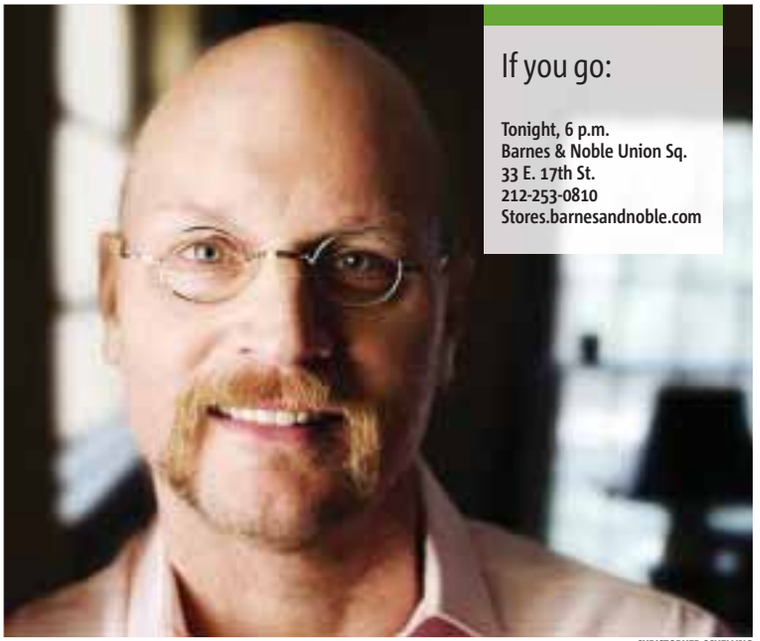
Augusten Burroughs, author of the intensely popular memoir "Running with Scissors," is back with his signature mix of humor and solemnity in "Lust & Wonder." His newest memoir (out Tuesday) is about how his various relationships with people changed after he got sober.

Burroughs has already written several memoirs about his difficult childhood and adulthood fails, so when he originally set out to write "Lust & Wonder," he wanted it to be a novel. But he kept hitting a dead end. Ultimately he let inspiration take over and the book as it exists today was born.

Figuring out what works

Just as he had to get out of his own way for his newest book to flow naturally, "Lust & Wonder" chronicles his attempts and failures to force relationships that weren't quite right.

The book documents the start of his sobriety, tracing two unsuccessful relationships in addition to the relationship with his literary agent and now-husband, Christopher Schelling. "I'd love it if the book got people thinking about what they actually want from a partner or if they're happy in their relationship," he tells us.



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Writing out the ugly truths

Throughout his years as a memoirist, Burroughs has learned the importance of honesty in writing. This honesty means not necessarily positioning himself — or others — in the best light.

"When something is uncomfortable to write about, or when I want to avoid writing about it, in my experience that tends to be a sign that I should keep going," Burroughs says. "I don't spit shine my life and myself on the page. I'm not really concerned with if my writing's going to be flattering to me," he says.

The price of telling the truth

But Burroughs has previously run into issues with what he maintains are his honest and fair representations of real life. In "Running With Scissors" he chronicles his negative experience living with his parents' psychiatrist's family, which he gives a fictional name, as an adolescent. The family sued Burroughs over their portrayal, and ultimately the suit was settled out of court.

"I try to write things as fairly and honestly as I can, but I've got to be truthful, and the truth isn't always flattering and it's not always pretty," Burroughs says.

It was while living with the psychiatrist's family that Burroughs believes he developed his humorous and "childlike optimism," which he hopes readers of "Lust & Wonder" will notice he still has, even at 50 years old.

The book is just out today, but Burroughs is already at work on his next books. He is writing three: two novels and a memoir.

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J-Law's trainer's No. 1 health tip will surprise you

Another one of Dalton Wong's fit tips: Fill up on healthy fats at lunch. It will keep you from craving sugary snacks later in the day. GETTY IMAGES

wellbeing

MAKE HEALTHY YOUR NEW HAPPY

Spoiler: You don't have to give up your favorite foods.

EMILY LAURENCE
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Unlike some celebrities who seem to eat hardly anything (we're looking at you, Tom and Gisele), Jennifer Lawrence loves booze and food. So how does her body look so amazing? Well, she has a little help. Lawrence — as well as Kit Harington, Amanda Seyfried and Zoe Kravitz — turn to personal trainer Dalton Wong to look good while still enjoying life. Now, Wong is spilling the secrets in his new book, "The Feelgood Plan." We asked Wong for his tips:

Know how to manage stress

The No. 1 thing Wong tells his clients is to learn how to relax. "It's not sexy, but it's one of the most important and powerful parts in order to be a healthy person," he says. "You can't just exercise more and eat less to have a sustainable lifestyle." His book has tips on unwinding at the end of the day and getting a good night's sleep to help the body and mind repair themselves from the stresses of everyday life. It's an important, yet unexpected tip.

Eat what you crave, just balance it out

Instead of mandating a diet, "The Feelgood Plan" teaches readers how to tweak the eating habits they already have, so they can still eat the food they like without going overboard.

"If you want to go out with your friends and have some cake or a glass of wine with your partner at the end of the day, do it. Just balance it out by eating healthier throughout the day," Wong says.

Indulge when you're happy, not sad

Wong makes a pointed observation: If you go out with your friends and you all decide to have some chocolate cake and a couple drinks, that's going to make you feel happy. But if you drink and eat cake because you are alone and upset, it won't. If you're going to indulge, make it worth it.

Have an anytime, anyplace workout

As a personal trainer to Hollywood's biggest actors, Wong says he often finds himself doing workouts in a lot of weird places. The moves in his book don't require any equipment and the routines only take 15 minutes. "I came up with it so there would be no excuses," he says. "If you don't have 15 minutes, then you're not really motivated to begin with."

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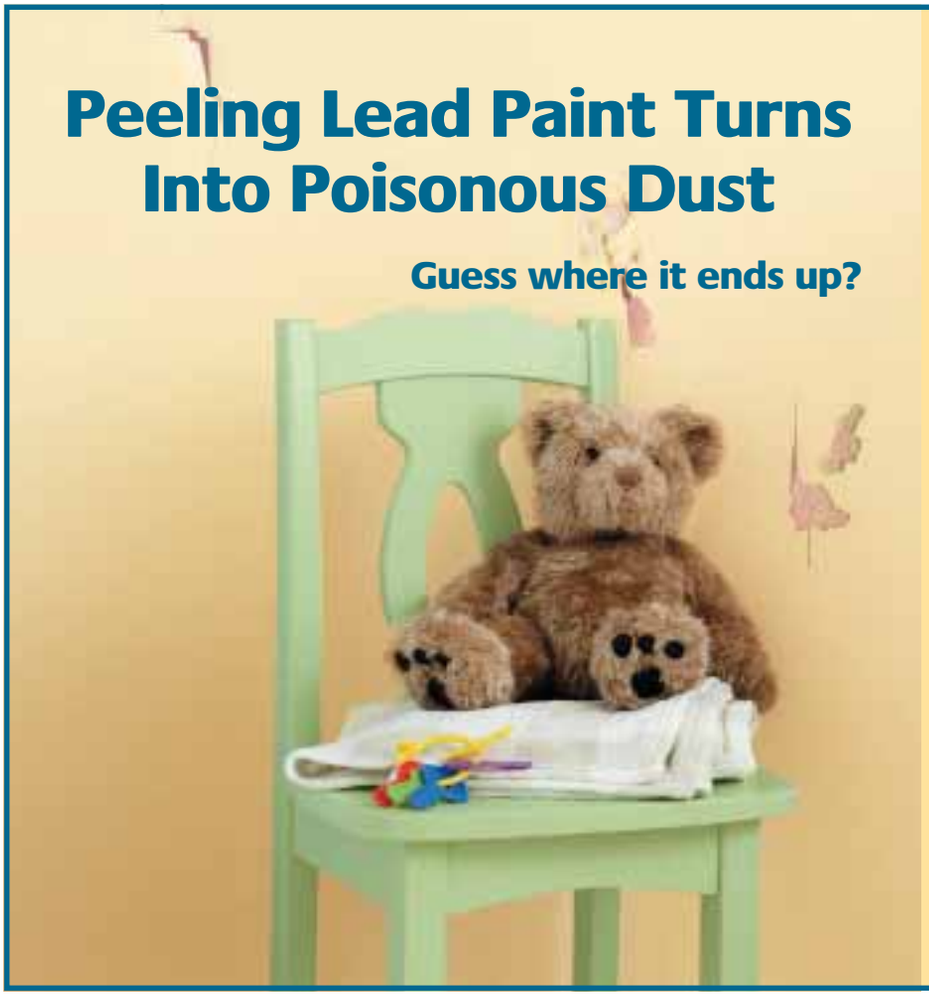

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The latest hangover cure: cactus water

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EMILY LAURENCE
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A new brand of trendy plant water just hit the Whole Foods shelves. Before you roll your eyes, manufacturer Steaz claims that its cactus water is not only the perfect post-workout recovery drink, but can also fight pimples and make your skin glow. Oh, and it supposedly prevents hangovers.

Skeptical? Between all the supposed hangover cures out there, like on-demand doctors who will show up to your home with an IV drip, chugging Pedialyte and drinking a nice big glass of pickle juice — yep, it's a thing — it's hard not to be a little jaded. Here's everything you need to know about this new "miracle drink."

Head to Metro.us for three cactus water cocktail recipes for your next pregame. ISTOCK

What it is

The desert may seem like the last logical place to look for hydration, but it's precisely because of the lack of rain that cacti have adapted to store water much longer than other plants. Hey, if you were stranded in the desert, chances are you'd drink up, too.

The water is extracted from the prickly pear cactus, known for its sweet fruit. Because the water comes from a fruit, it has a naturally sweet, berry-flavored taste, with less sugar and calories than coconut water.

OK, so it tastes good and is low in sugar — awesome. But why is it generating buzz among fitness fanatics? It turns out prickly pear juice is packed with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, which all help athletes recover faster after a workout.

Will it really make you prettier?

Truth be told, the main key for keeping your skin from looking dry and flaky is hydration, so drinking regular old tap water will still work wonders, but plant water has vitamins that regular H2O doesn't, so it does give a little something extra.

If you're part of the coconut water squad, you already know about its anti-inflammatory qualities, which help keep skin looking fresh. Cactus water has antioxidants too, and one in particular — betalain — is know in the beauty biz for being the secret cure to undereye puffiness. Added bonus: Cactus water's essential fatty acids act as a natural oil barrier, actually helping prevent pimples.

About that hangover cure

Anything with electrolytes helps regulate hydration — the almighty key to curing your morning-after headache — so that puts cactus water up in the ranks with Gatorade for what to stock your fridge with when you're getting ready to rage.

The only true way to prevent a hangover is to moderate your alcohol intake, but if you're set on a wild night out, cactus water isn't a bad idea for a mixer, especially since it's naturally sweet (unlike mixing your vodka with coconut water or maple water, which just sounds gross).

We're all about the prevent-while-you-party mind-set, so head to Metro.us for three cactus water cocktail recipes for your next pregame.

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'Cuse run is more than improbable

Syracuse may be least likely Final Four team ever.

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Jim Boeheim, far right, and the Syracuse Orange are back in the Final Four for the first time since 2013. GETTY IMAGES

"Improbable" is one of those words that routinely finds its way into the sports lexicon. In fact, it's right up there with "great" and "unbelievable" in terms of overuse. Doing a Google search for the word "improbable" Monday, three of the top four stories that popped up involved Syracuse's unprecedented march to the Final Four. In this particular case, the cliche shoe (errr, slipper) fits.

Just one year ago, one could easily make the case that Syracuse was closer to becoming St. John's (a hoops powerhouse that faded away as the years went by) than a Final Four participant. A year ago at this time, the Orange program was not a participant in postseason play as it gave itself a postseason ban due to the NCAA's investigation into multiple violations.

"The University has taken this matter seriously and worked with the NCAA for nearly eight years to investigate and address potential rules violations," said Syracuse Chancelor Kent Syverud at the time. "The process has been exhaustive."

Yup, this stuff had been going on since 2007 and "what's going to happen to Jim Boeheim?" became the No. 1 storyline associated with the program. "How far do you think Syracuse will go this year?" became a distant second. When the poop hit the fan last year, Boeheim announced that he would step down in 2018 and that assistant Mike Hopkins would take over. Many wondered why the then 70-year-old Boeheim didn't just throw in the towel right then and there. He wasn't going to the postseason in 2015, he was going to be embarrassingly suspended for nine games in 2015-16 and the Syracuse name had taken such a hit due to the investigation that it was going to become exceedingly difficult to lure stars to snowy, upstate New York. Boeheim was also docked a whopping 101 wins as part of the school's punishment — cementing the fact that he wouldn't become the all-time winningest coach in men's college hoops history.

In other words, Boeheim must really love this coaching stuff. Because things were pretty dire not too long ago and there really wasn't a clear route back to the top. But here we are. Just a year removed from the program's lowest point.

The Orange's come-from-behind win over 1-seed Virginia on Sunday night perfectly encapsulated the program's run over the past year. Down 16 points in the second half, it was going to take an improbable turn of events to win. The Orange outscored the Cavaliers 15-3 in the final 6:30 and Boeheim's ticket to a fifth Final Four was booked.

"You know, it's great to go to the Final Four. It's great for this team because I only look at the basketball side," Boeheim said. "I mean, I thought we deserved to be in the tournament, but certainly I didn't — I wasn't planning on getting to the Final Four."

Boeheim and Syracuse are now just two wins away from their first National Championship since 2003. If that goes down six days from now, we're going to have to come up with a word more improbable than improbable.

10

SYRACUSE WOULD BECOME THE LOWEST SEED EVER (10) TO WIN A NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP. VILLANOVA CURRENTLY HOLDS THE RECORD, AS ITS 1985 SQUAD WON AS A NO. 8 SEED.

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Yankees, Mets spring notebook

The 2016 regular season is less than a week away.

ROBERT CRISCOLA
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Luis Severino had a rocky beginning to the spring, giving up five runs in just over an inning of work in his first start. But he's turned it around, and is attracting the attention of his manager and teammates.

"He's pitched very well this spring," Joe Girardi said last week. "He's probably pitched as well as anyone that we have."

Severino had a strong performance against the Mets last week, giving up two runs on five hits while striking out five in 4.1 IP. Before that, Severino had a 10.2 scoreless innings streak going, and had struck out 12 batters while walking none in that span.

"He's very mature at a young age," Girardi said. "The big thing is for him to continue to get experience and make adjustments as teams make adjustments to him. [But] when you have stuff like he does and you compete as hard as he does, you're usually going to have success."

C.C. Sabathia, who had great success at a young age with the Indians, praised his teammate as well.

"It's awesome," he said, "I think you have to give him extra points for being able to pitch in New York; I don't know if I would have been able to handle that the way I did in Cleveland. It's great to see."

Shaky Steven

Steven Matz had another shaky outing last week against the Yankees, giving up five earned runs, seven hits and two walks in four innings. Matz currently carries an 8.31 ERA in four exhibition starts, but he is dismissive of those numbers.

"You try to work on stuff," Matz told reporters after the game. "At the same time, you're facing the New York Yankees. That stuff's going to happen. I had one bad inning this time out but…I got some results the last few batters. That's the stuff you're going to deal with during the season."

Matz referred to the second inning of his start on Tuesday, in which he gave up all five of the runs he was charged with. But in his defense, he retired eight straight batters to end his outing.

Terry Collins backed up the youngest of his projected starters by saying, "You can't let it bother you. That's part of being pitching in the big leagues. If you have a rough inning you got to be able to keep your team in it and he did that."

Yoenis Cespedes OK after scare

There was a scary moment involving Yoenis Cespedes last week, as he hit a foul ball off his left shin during the Mets/Yankees tilt and momentarily went to the ground. Cespedes proceeded to shake it off, stay in the game, and hit a line drive double.

"I went to go tell him he can go ice it but he said, 'No, I want to keep playing,'" Collins remarked before adding, "He's fine."

Cespedes has been on a tear this spring, batting .417 in 11 games played. He's tied for the club lead in hits with 13.

Luis Severino has turned a few heads this spring. GETTY IMAGES

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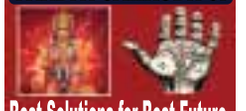

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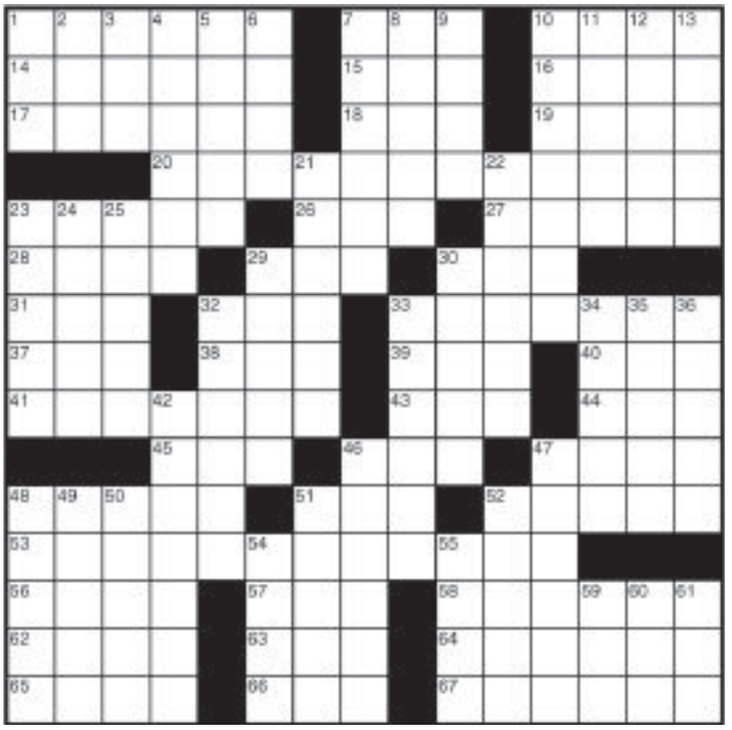

Across

1 Sparse
7 Gob of bubblegum
10 Pack of cards
14 Kind of paste
15 Teahouse attire
16 Grades 1-12
17 Whinnies
18 Gloating cry
19 Cell block brawl
20 Doesn't hold back (3 wds.)
23 Feels dizzy
26 Always, to Poe
27 Ceremonies
28 Prevail upon
29 DVD predecessor
30 Sawbones
31 Recline
32 Zuider -- (var.)
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44 Winery cask
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	6				5	1		7
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	3					5		
9						8	6	1
		6		9		2	4	

metro.us/horoscopes

Aries Revamp what you have to offer to fit current trends. Use your skills to supplement your income. Discussing how you feel with someone you love will result in positive changes.

Taurus Don't make unrealistic promises or underestimate your worth. It's more important to invest in yourself than to help someone else get ahead. Romance is in the stars.

Gemini Anger could prevent you from making a smart move. A constructive approach to dealing with your responsibilities will help you avoid complaints.

Cancer Get down to business and focus on what's expected of you. A change of philosophy will result from an encounter or experience. Do what works best for you.

Leo Stick to your budget in order to avoid being taken advantage of financially. Step into the spotlight and promote what you have to offer.

Virgo You will be blamed or criticized for your recklessness if you take chances. Get the approval of anyone your actions will affect before you proceed.

Libra Expand your knowledge and interests. If you apply what you learn, you will secure your earning potential. A trip, lecture or research expedition will prove inspirational.

Scorpio Your intuition will help you make a good decision. A playful but responsible attitude will help you get through any work-related matters that need addressing.

Sagittarius Keep a low profile. Problems while traveling or when dealing with institutions can be expected. Be precise to avoid a misunderstanding.

Capricorn The actions you undertake for others will be valued. An unusual offering will take you by surprise. Before you accept, find out if there are any stipulations.

Aquarius Formulate your strategy and turn your plan into a reality. Play by the rules and be ready to deal with anyone who tries to dismantle your game plan. Finish what you start.

Pisces Keep an open mind and a pure heart. Listen to concerns, and comfort and nurture anyone on your team who is lacking strength. You are only as strong as your weakest link.

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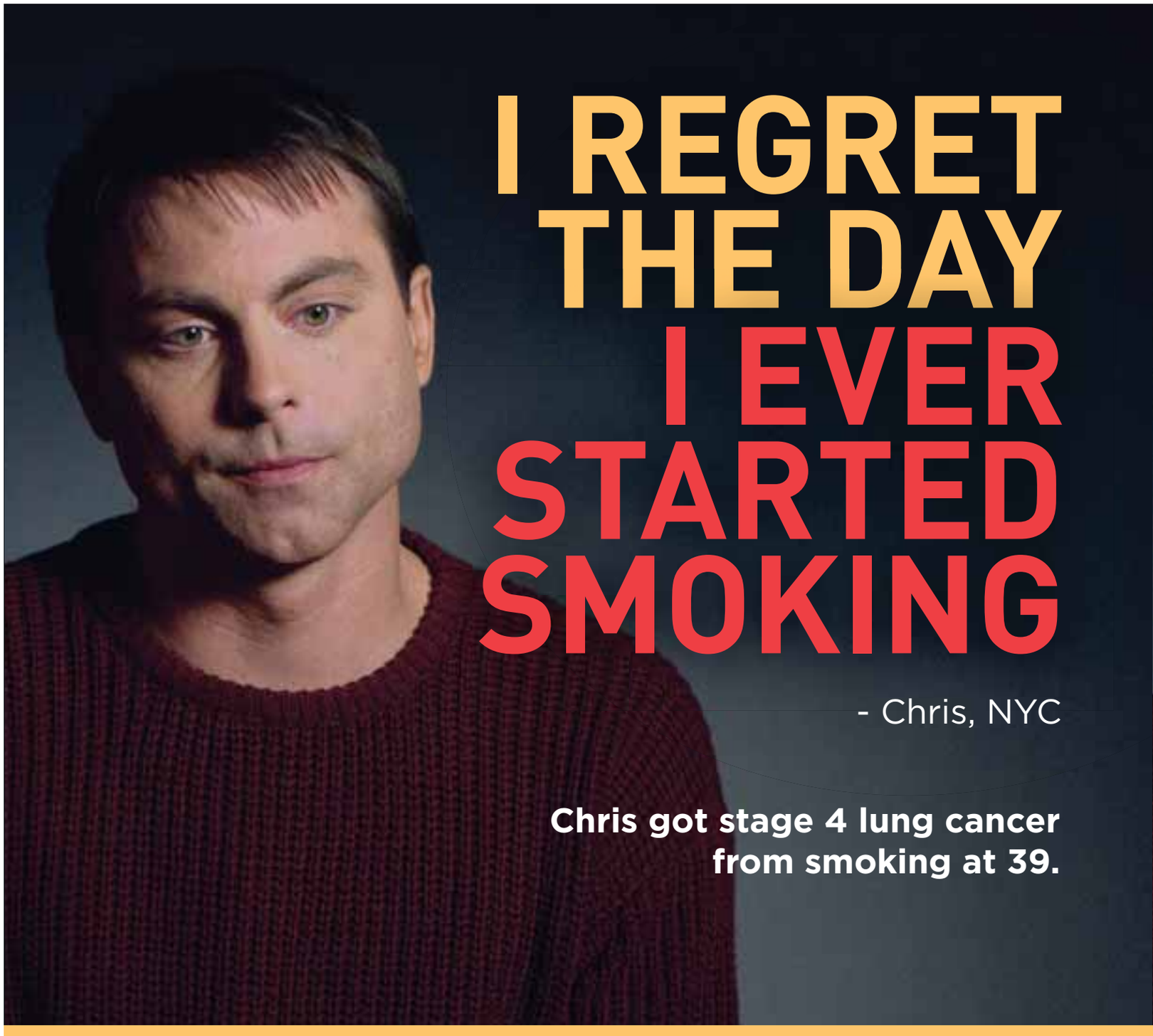
NICOTINE PATCH & GUM GIVEAWAY

LIMITED TIME ONLY: NOW THROUGH APRIL 13



I REGRET THE DAY I EVER STARTED SMOKING

- Chris, NYC

Chris got stage 4 lung cancer from smoking at 39.

You may be eligible for New York City's

NICOTINE PATCH & GUM GIVEAWAY

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QUIT SMOKING TODAY.

For free medication and other help, visit
nysmokefree.com or **call 311** or **866-NYQUITS**

NYC